

Herald 251

Chapter 251 Talks With The Twins (Part-1)

The demand that Alexander made a tall one.

A very tall one.

Because making arrows was a very specialized job.

Here was in detail how to make one arrow.

First, the wood would be split and cut to the right length and then planed with a flat plane at first, followed by a rounded one. And then the wood would be smoothed with sandstone. A notch would have to be cut at one end for the bowstring and filled with cow horn or deer antler to prevent the arrow from splitting when placed against the bowstring.

Next, the fletcher would whip and fletch the shaft. Whipping was done to wrap a string around the shaft, which was waterproofed to stop it from warping in storage, and then the feathers would be split and applied to the shaft. These feathers would be cut from the quills or turkeys and placed in grooved or notched lines at the back of the shaft and would then be then sealed in with glues based on animal fat.

An important detail here was to add special compounds to the animal glues that were used which deterred rats from eating the arrows in storage.

Also, there would be only three feathers on an arrow instead of being on all four sides. as because the side that was going to be in contact with the bow had to have none.

And finally, the arrowheads would be fitted into the other end of the arrow which were produced by arrowsmiths.

There were mainly two ways to attach the shaft to the head.

One was to make the arrowhead tail hollow, stick in the shaft, and hammer the tail close.

And the other way was to make the tail sharp and pointy, heat it up, and then push it into the shaft, by burning a hole in the process.

To save time, arrows would be made in batches, with the nock and arrowhead being added to the shaft one day, and then being left to dry for a while, before the fletcher went to work.

And in this way, on average it took about two hours to make each arrow, where half that time would be used to cut the shaft, while each arrowhead took about half an hour to make,

Of course, this was the total man-hours needed to make an arrow.

Thus theoretically one hundred and twenty men could make an arrow every minute.

But in reality, the number was six minutes for every arrow, achieved by working as a group and using the division of labor, where one man did only one very specialized job.

It took some time for the slack-jawed Faziz to return to his senses, as he possibly suffered a minor heart attack at the monumental command.

"Master...that's..." Faziz wanted to let Alexander know just how hard it would be to train one hundred men to make ten arrows an hour in just two months.

This would be a tough task even if that was Faziz's only job, not to mention he had a myriad of other obligations,

But Alexander paid no heed to it, "I demand such because such speed will be needed to keep up with demand. Thus it needs to be done."

Alexander paid Faziz the big bucks to make such things happen and Faziz would find out that Alexander was a very generous, but also very demanding lord, his rich rewards locked behind a high-difficulty curve.

Alexander's tough stance left Faziz no room to argue and so the man could only reply, "I will try my best master."

"Mmm, good," Alexander lightly smiled and then decided to give Faziz a few extra perks to help in his endeavor, "You can recruit anyone from my slave pool as you like."

"And if you have any special request, inform Takfiz or even come directly to me. And it does not have to be just a hundred, if you want, if you think you need more, hire more. Just remember to tell me." Alexander gave Faziz such power.

This amount of relief made Faziz let out a small breath of relief and he expressed his gratitude, "Thank you, master. Your grace is boundless."

"Mnnn, Takfiz, remember to give him whatever he needs," Alexander reminded the old man not to play factional politics and after a few such small exchanges, with dusk imminent, Alexander finally decided to return to his manor.

'I wonder how Cam's day has been,' He thought eagerly about the prisoners and fresh slaves to be had.

The latter was especially very attractive to him as Alexander had felt like his ears were rotting away at all his lords asking him for the same thing, 'More men', 'More men'.

They all were critically short on men.

'If I keep hearing them asking for more men, I bet I will start dreaming of the word 'more men'.' Alexander half-jokingly, half with irritation said to himself as he sometimes fought off the urge to shout to the men, 'If you want men so much, then why don't you go home and make some'.

With these bittersweet thoughts in his mind, Alexander approached the manor, finding the place peaceful and tranquil as ever, with large braissers being slowly lit up.

All the staff naturally bowed as Alexander made his way into the house, and after a bath, he sat down for his supper- boiled chicken basted in butter with a lemon-based sauce, fried salmon, and salad with white bread.

"I'm sure you have heard about the incident at the temple, your twin highness," Alexander addressed as he had his meal, noticing that Azura and Azira had barely touched their plate, their faces pale and downcast.

"..." The twins were so hurt that they did not even reply.

And so the eldest guardian, the Queen mother made the conversion, "*Sigh*", yes. We were all so shocked by the news that all of us felt like being paralyzed for the whole day. I could barely get up from the bed after getting such vile news."

The queen mother said this in a very melodramatic tone and even seemed to tear up a bit.

This caused Mikaya to silently roll her eyes, 'Bullshit. You let the news of the priests' killing go in through one ear and out the next. And then you spent the rest of the day playing cards with me!'

Mikaya had lost all of her yesterday's winning to the Queen mother and certainly wanted to expose this crocodile tears-shedding woman.

Hellma too had seen what her mother had actually done the entire day and she said to herself, 'You said that it was likely that Alexander did it. So what's with the theatrics?'

The queen mother did not know for sure whether Alexander had any part in it, but fortunately for her, she took a stab in the dark and it hit the bullseyes.

"It is certainly a bad look for any lord if the temples in his land are desecrated and their priests killed." Mikaya gave a gentle smile as she sent a potent jab at Alexander.

'Bitch!' Cambyses cursed at this detestable woman, barely holding back the urge to say it aloud.

"Haha, yes, miss Mikaya is right. I'm ashamed of my incompetence as the lord of Zanzan. And it is evident that as a former lowly slave, I really do lack talent in governance. Thus I pray that your lordship may guide me on what to do next," Instead of flaring up or cursing Mikaya, Alexander only returned the taunt with an even more self-deprecating remark, sarcasm dripping like honey.

Alexander's answers made Mikaya's lips twitch and she then swiftly lowered her head to get back to eating after cursing in her heart, 'Honorless scoundrel'.

She had always found it hard to insult or mock Alexander because he was very much unlike any noble she had ever met.

All the nobles that Mikaya had ever met were many things, ranging from courageous and honorable to meek and timid, to even unscrupulous and a low-life.

But they all had one common trait- pride.

Pride as a noble that they would never let anyone trample.

But Alexander did not seem to have any pride.

Whenever Mikaya or for that case anyone else mocked him for something, whether it be his administrative skills or his low birth lineage, instead of hiding it or defending himself, Alexander would flaunt it, and even go as far as to demean himself even more than the person attacking him.

Alexander's answer produced a slightly awkward silence, but was soon broken by Azira's meek tone, "Does your lord know who is responsible?"

"My spies informed me that various city gangs were involved. And we have captured all of them for interrogation," Alexander gave the girl some uplifting news.

"That's good." Azira seemed to cheer up.

"Don't let them die too easily," This scary sentence was immediately said afterward by her sister Azura, who had a menacing look on her after knowing the culprits were caught.

'You girls really hide some sting don't you,' Alexander was surprised to see this side of the usually innocent and pure girls.

Chapter 252 Talks With The Twins (Part-2)

Every person in the world had things that ticked them off, their reverse scale.

And for Azira and Azura it was their belief, the temple, and its priests.

As people who were once saintesses, naturally, their faith and piety belonged to among the highest tiers of believers and thus anyone who attacked their institution of faith was viewed with utmost hostility.

Thus it was not really too surprising for the pure, innocent girls to order a painful death to the, in their eyes, infidels.

For them, these people deserved no salvation, only the utmost suffering.

"We will burn the leaders." Alexander soothingly informed them and then reassured further, "And we will send the rest to the mines till they die."

"Umm, that's good, that's very good," Azira very approvingly nodded, a dazzling smile forming on her face, which was soon accompanied by her equally beautiful sister.

This pair of cute, pure smiles very much contrasted the dark subject that they were happy over.

Even the ultra-sheltered princess knew of the horror stories of the mines, horrific temperatures, back-breaking work, long, brutal hours, and polluted, dusty air.

A man strong as a bull might the mines and come out in a year as just bags of skin and bones.

"A fitting punishment for these scums," Azura nodded along with her sister, very enthusiastic and approving of Alexander's disciplining.

For the twins, infidels were not humans and as such did not deserve to be treated as such.

'Master, she called you a scum,' Ophenia could barely keep a straight face, knowing that the twins were gleefully thanking the actual mastermind for trying to find the supposed mastermind.

The situation was so funny that Ophenia had to take large mouthfuls of her bread to keep her from laughing out loud.

"Your highness, now that many of the priests are....gone, the people of Zanzan, have no one to lead the temples." Alexander then began the second stage of his scheme.

Saying, "So, like I said the day before said yesterday, I was hoping that you could not just join the temple but lead it!"

After this, Alexander quickly added, "Of course, I'm sure that His Majesty will understand the special circumstances."

Azira and Azura had an innate desire to join the temple and so when Alexander gave them the perfect excuse, of course, they did not argue.

"Ummm, well...if it's for the people..." Azira made it look like she was thinking it over.

"Mmm...since it's for the people,...then it can't be helped I guess," Azura helped complete her sister's little play.

"Yes, it's to help the people after all, haha," Alexander too buttressed the twin's desire for an excuse.

But then added, "Though Your highness, I will need to insist that you now follow King Ptolomy's version of the religion."

"What!"

"How dare you!"

The two little kitties were predictably enraged.

"That's not what you promised them yesterday, Your Lordship," The Queen mother also felt Alexander was trying to swindle them and she stepped in defense of the girls.

Even though she was only the twin's guardian in nominal terms, she felt that she could not just let a mere noble bully the royalty.

That was reserved only for the royal members themselves.

She was also apprehensive about what Alexander had planned for the girls.

Sure, she would love to see Amenheraft's religion be replaced with Ptolomy's version of the faith of Ramuh.

And with the famed saintesses from the grand temple of Adhan themselves endorsing it, the Queen mother was sure that the numbers of this new religion would swell exponentially in the blink of an eye in Zanzan.

But, Alexander stank of raw, unadulterated ambition, a smell she was very familiar with as she too emitted the same pheromones and thus felt that letting this dangerous man succeed in any of his plans, even in plans that on the surface might seem to be beneficial for her was not a good idea.

Seelima had no proof of any existence of Alexander's schemes against the crown, but it was a gut feeling of hers, a woman's instinct.

And that was enough for her, as that same supernatural ability had saved her butt countless times.

But Alexander was not going to let anyone stop him.

"Haha, the Queen mother is misunderstanding me. Yesterday's offer was made taking into account the realities of yesterday. Today's offer is being made taking into account today's realities." Alexander lightly chuckled while narrowing his eyes.

"..." Alexander's display of his current clearly superior position made it so that the Queen mother could only form a flat look.

After all, she had little way to counter him in his own city.

Alexander did not pursue this matter with the Queen mother any longer.

Because it was not up to the Queen mother to decide but ultimately Azira and Azura.

Thus, without giving the former Queen enough time to think of a rebuttal, he turned to his real prey.

"Princesses, I know that you are hesitant to accept the new version of the religion." Alexander began, saying, "But please rest assured that it really is not that different from your current version, with the only difference being that god Ramuh has a wife now who rules jointly with his consort, the goddess Gaia." Alexander downplayed the significance.

"Hmmp, we don't want any of your Thesian gods."

"Yeah, we believe in only god Ramuh and no other god can be mentioned in the same breath as him."

Azira and Azura were staunch supporters of their faith and would not let it be tainted by Alexander's evil ideas.

"Haha, the twin princesses' pure faith makes this lord feel impressed and touched," Alexander gently smiled at the unequivocal rejection.

"What the princesses said is true. Or rather was true." He then gently corrected Azira and Azura with a light smile, explaining, "Ramuh as the leader of the pantheon of gods did once have no challenger that could be mentioned in the same breath as him. But the key point to that argument is the word 'did'. He 'did' have no challenger." Alexander repeated to emphasize the point.

"But that is not the case now," Alexander said while gently shaking his head, causing the twins to twist their faces in anger.

'There he goes with that baseless accusation that Lord Ramuh has lost against that goddess in a divine battle,' The twins' cursed in their hearts, feeling anger flare at the blasphemy words frequently uttered by Alexander.

If Alexander was not so powerful. they certainly would have turned him into pristine barbeque by burning him at the stake as a heretic.

"We have heard your claim before and we will respond the same way we did before- Ridiculous!" Azira spoke for both of them in a high-pitched, firm voice.

"Hahaha," Alexander did not seem to mind the rude rejection, as he reasoned, "Your Highness should not be so quick to dismiss such claims. After all, not one but two temples of Ramuh have been attacked."

Alexander then raised his index finger as he claimed, "The temples are supposed to be the bastions of the gods. Inviolable sacred places that mere mortals dare not sully. Yet, not once, but twice, they have been attacked, their wealth sacked and the inhabitants killed."

Alexander's voice rose a few octaves as he listed, "In just two months, tens of billions of ropals have been stolen and hundreds of priests and priestesses have been slain. Weren't these clergymen supposed to be Ramuh's favored? Weren't they supposed to be under Ramuh's protection? Weren't they supposed to be the most privileged class in Adhania?" Alexander posed the series of questions to the twins.

"You are the one who stole the tens of billions of ropals from us!"

"And you are the one who killed the hundreds of priests in Adhan, scoundrel!"

"To think that you will play the victim! Shameless!"

"That's right. Shameless!"

Azira and Azura naturally flared at Alexander posing as a sheep in wolf's clothing.

Though they had not connected Alexander to today's events, they were not foolish to the point that Alexander could hoodwink them about Adhan too.

Alexander only gave a shy smile at the true accusations and then shamelessly admitted, "Hehe, all of Your Highness's claims are right. I did take from the grand temple of Ramuh in Adhan and many priests did die under my command."

"But," Alexander added after this frank admission, "Your Highness should not be asking why I did such a thing. They should be asking how."

"How could a mortal like me have the guts to rob the gods and not only get punished for it but instead be rewarded for it? I was a mere slave, a being not even worth as much as dust in Your Highnesses' eyes just two months ago."

"And look at me now?" Alexander grandly spread out his arms as he said so, causing the twins to subconsciously look at the opulent surrounding that all belonged to Alexander.

'Could he be telling the truth? Is Lord Ramuh too weak to punish him?' These dark thoughts started to taint the twin's pristine belief.

Chapter 253 Talk With The Twins (Part-3)

Though Azira and Azura hid it well, they were concerned by the weak state their god supposedly was at.

Alexander's claims were backed up by evidence and facts and in the less than two months that the twins knew Alexander, they had not forgotten how the boy younger than them had managed to make himself appear as a supremely skilled general, orator, and administrator.

The gods seemed to favor him as their favorite child, gifting him multiple divine gifts, any one of which would have made others green with envy.

In Azira and Azura's eyes, it was the gods that gifted Alexander supreme tactical knowledge that enable him to triumph not once but twice over his father's outnumbering forces.

They had given him a supremely skilled tongue that enabled a mere slave like him to go toe-to-toe and even beat the best politicians of Adhania in verbal contests and even beat them.

And his administrator skills did not even need mentioning.

Though the twins would never admit it, they doubted even their grandfather, whom they most looked up to, could have done what Alexander had done in Zanzan.

Stopping the plague, preventing a rebellion, and getting everyone jobs- any of these tasks would have been a monumental achievement.

And it would have taken anyone else months to accomplish that.

But Alexander had done so in days.

And the twins believed that it was only due to Alexander's blistering speed at which he solved these problems that he could stay in Zanzan as their lord.

Or else, he most likely would have had to tuck his tail between his legs and return to Adhan as the city would have become a ghost town.

With such boisterous accolades under the young boy's belt and having met him personally and experienced his charm firsthand, the twins were having ambivalent feelings about the Pasha's claims.

"Are you saying that Lord Ramuh has comprised with your goddess after he suffered some minor setbacks?" Azira asked spookily in a low voice, dressing up the events nicely.

"Yes," Alexander did not burst the bubble of politeness and instead quickly added, "Your Highnesses don't have to preach about the goddess. You can continue to exclusively preach the words of Ramuh."

"What we only ask is that you do not actively object to the goddess's presence," Alexander pleaded.

"....." The twins furrowed their brows in contemplation, while the adults around them, namely Mikaya and Seelima only silently watched, respecting the twins' right to make their own choice.

"Your Highness, please remember that the two attacks on the temples are the only ones that we know of," This was said by Cambyses, who spoke up to support her husband, advising, "It would be the best for all the devotees of Ramuh if an additional god was there to protect them."

These honeyed words sent the twins into a second round of rumination, after a long while of which, Azira, understanding the reality of the situation in a whispering tone spoke up, "We will allow the goddess's statue into our temple."

"But we will personally not acknowledge its existence," Azura quickly spoke up.

"Hahaha, that's okay, that's okay," Alexander laughed heartily at the conditions, saying, "As long as Your Highness does not actively stop others from acknowledging the goddess Gaia, all's okay."

"Umm...then we have a deal," Azira nodded curtly.

"Mmm, and don't forget to tell the king about us. We won't let you swindle us by sneakily re-instating us and then denying it when you get caught," Azura very cleverly said, feeling very pleased with herself for foiling one of Alexander's potential pitfalls.

Though according to all the real clever people in the room, they felt that Azura was concentrating on being clever at the wrong thing.

"Hahaha, the twin Highnesses' intellects are sharper than the best swords. I would never dare employ such underhanded tactics," Alexander slyly chuckled, finding the twins' naivety very endearing.

"Mmm, you better remember that," The twins were very happy that they had managed to at least eke out a tiny victory against Alexander.

As their aunt, Mikaya had only silently watched this show with a placid façade, though internally she wanted to slap her forehead repeatedly at the naivety of her twin nieces who were being played like a fiddle by Alexander.

But ultimately, because of what Alexander had promised her, she kept her mouth shut and obediently eat her food.

Instead, she had restricted herself to only rolling her eyes, saying to herself, 'You idiots deserve to get swindled.'

But the twins did not have the time to notice the subtle change and instead were distracted by other things, mainly their rumbling bellies.

Both the sisters could not find the will to eat anything since the morning but now that this cloud of depression had been cast out over the happy news of them re-entering the church, hunger returned to collect its debt.

And so, out of happiness, they began to tear large pieces of the bread and started quickly swallowing it down accompanied by a varied assortment of meat, fish, and wine.

Alexander then continued to make various small talk during the rest of the meal and like that, eventually. the dinner reached its happy conclusion.

After the dishes were cleared off the table, Alexander decided to head off to his study, skipping the card night the girls were going to shortly have after.

This was because he still had a lot of work to do, mostly the interrogation.

As Alexander made his way through the central hall, he was not alone though, flanked by the police chief herself, Cambyzes on his left, and the sacred priestess Ophenia on the right.

The former was there because Alexander was eager to know how big of a haul she managed to catch.

And the latter was there because Alexander wanted to form a new spy agency under her.

As the trio entered the study, they found it occupied by a guest, not an unfamiliar figure by any stretch but certainly an unconventional one.

"So, how are you liking your new title, shordar (Baron) Camius?" Alexander asked the man he had instructed to wait here with a little smirk.

"Doc, that little play was not funny," Camius sent Alexander a wry smile while shaking his head at the mischievous play.

"Haha, but your face was funny" Alexander chuckled as he sat down opposite his spymaster, with the two girls beside him.

"With this others will guess that I'm your spymaster...won't that be a problem?" Camius felt that this outcome was antithetical to the whole plan.

"Let them. They already know that you spy for me, so there's no point hiding that from them," Alexander simply brushed Camius's worries off, and then gave the real reason for the play, "The point of that play was to deceive the enemy who are not yet aware of you. As long as you don't exist publicly, most will not think too much. And that's what really matters."

In this era where it was hard for information to propagate, naturally, any outside force will focus on Alexander and his council members.

Who would have the time to dig the list of all the people who had on the surface lost Alexander's favor and then thoroughly investigate them on the off chance that one of them was secretly being heavily favored by him?

"Whatever you say doc," Camius shrugged his shoulder at Alexander's reason while taking a sip of the wine.

Alexander then turned to Cambyses. "So, how did your catch go? Any problems?"

"No. It went well, no problem," Cambyses shook her head as she answered.

And then added in a slightly regretful voice, "We caught about eight hundred, though two hundred managed to escape. But we will catch them in two-three days."

"Those that ran were all only small fries." Camius quickly chipped in, informing, "All the big targets were caught. I checked,"

The reason why Camius knew this was because Alexander had sent him to identify all the gang leaders after their capture as the others did not know these people by their faces.

"So, where are all the prisoners being detained?" Alexander asked.

"We converted a small part of the barrack to a makeshift holding cell. Well, Bartholomew did," Cambyses gave the answer.

"And the interrogation?" Alexander was most interested in this.

"Like you asked, we have taken the leaders, stripped them, separated them, and put them out in the freezing outside, while regularly dousing them in cold water. They should be talking soon," Camius reiterated Alexander's technique.

Compared to the conventional beating, breaking, and nail pulling, this method seemed tame to Camius, and so he was curious about its efficacy.

"Umm, good. I will go with you to personally question them. Hopefully, my technique will not be too much of a disaster," Alexander himself was not sure how much his method would work.

He had only copied this technique from a movie he had seen, the only difference being there was that the cold Zanzan night was substituted by a cold freezer, with the thought that a slow-burning suffering was more intolerable than physical beatings and torture.

And only today would he find the empirical proof of that.

Chapter 254 Camius's Gift

Alexander in his free time had once read the biography of Hanns-Joachim Gottlob Scharff, who was a German interrogator during the Second World War.

He had been called the "Master Interrogator" of the Luftwaffe, and possibly of all Nazi Germany and he was also praised for his contribution in shaping U.S. interrogation techniques after the war.

And the primary way he made even tough captured GIs and commandos speak things beyond their name and serial number, was by portraying himself as their closest ally in this predicament, telling them that while he would like nothing more than to see them safely deposited in a POW camp; his hands were tied unless the prisoner gave him some more details that he requested to help him properly identify the prisoner as a true POW, or he would be forced to send them to a slave labor camps or worse, the gas chambers.

And usually, these details would be confidential information like the name of the soldier's commander, his unit's strength, their gear, their logistic capabilities, etc.

The list would be endless.

And even after all the information had been extracted, Scharff would continue to act as a good friend, including sharing jokes, homemade food items, and occasionally alcoholic beverages, to help these men spread his good word, in preparation for the next batch of POWs.

Hanns's method also influenced many modern interrogation theorists, who reasoned that physical pain, in addition to being barbaric and uncivilized, also tended to last only while the beatings were being done and would ebb away a while after the beating stopped, while a slow, constant pain would eventually build up, gnaw at one's resistance, and after hours of enduring it, suddenly the dams of resistance would break and all kinds of confessions would come in one giant burst

And while Alexander never really experienced the sensation of getting his bones broken and then being stepped on it, he did once read an article about captured French partisans by Nazis who claimed that even when they beat these prisoners severely, it was very difficult to get anything useful, which prompted him to believe more on Hanns's philosophy.

And his conviction was further bolstered by the fact that the US army used these techniques and he certainly wanted to emulate the greatest military of his time and even of all time.

Thus he had always planned to write a spy manual book for Camius, using stuff he had read, heard, and seen,

And one of the sections in that book was bound to be about effective interrogation, that is, getting the desired information swiftly and accurately.

And today, Alexander was planning to use the gang leaders to put his movie and theoretical knowledge to the test.

And if even the best military in his previous world, the US army, had moved themselves from most physical tortures, switching to relatively mind techniques such as waterboarding, which left no explicit scars, then Alexander was pretty confident in his chances that his 'non-violent' technique would be useful.

But for now, Alexander decided to let actions speak louder than words.

"Okay, Camius. I think that's it now." Alexander seemed to have finished the topic about the prisoners for now.

But instead of dismissing him, Alexander told him to stay and then went over to his table to bring out a small parchment from his locked drawer.

"Here, read this," Alexander then handed them over to Camius, who quickly started to scan them.

The parchment contained ten points and seemed to be a new kind of wine recipe.

It read

1. Pick only well-ripened early grapes and discard any that are mildewed or damaged.
2. Drive forked branches or stakes made of rods tied into bundles into the ground at a distance of about 4 feet apart.
3. Lay reeds across them and spread the grapes out in the sun on top.
4. Cover them at night so that the dew will not moisten them.
5. When they are dried, pick the grapes off the stems and put them in a jar or pitcher.
6. Add some unfermented wine until the grapes are just covered.
7. After six days, when the grapes have absorbed it all and are swollen, put them in a basket, then put them through the press, and collect the resulting liquid.
8. Next, press the mass, adding fresh unfermented wine made with other grapes which have been left in the sun for three days.

9. Stir it well, and put it through the press again.

10. Bottle the liquid of the second press in stoppered jars so it will not turn sour.

11. After 20 or 30 days when the fermentation is over, decant it into fresh vessels.

12. Coat the lids with plaster and cover them with leather to avoid spoilage.

This was a homebrew recipe for making wine that his grandmother would occasionally use, preferring it because this wine did not have hops in them which the lady did not find the taste favorable.

As a wine connoisseur, she had always advocated for the purity of wine, preferring to use only the main ingredients.

"Doc! This! This! This!" Camius exclaimed with trembling hands at this information before him, stammering and shaking in sheer joy.

Wine recipes were zealously guarded by their owners, to the point that many times there would only ever be one copy of it, under the exclusive privy of the writer, and would be only passed on from successor to successor, with even the other children of the owner unaware of the recipe.

And in some extreme cases, it would not be even written down, but be passed down orally.

And so for Alexander to just hand over such a gold mine made Camius shiver in both joy and fear.

Joy at getting possession of such a lucrative recipe.

Fear at the massive trust that Alexander was placing on him and thus the pressure to live up to that.

"Hahaha, don't take it too seriously. Think of it as a gift for becoming shordar (baron)," Alexander chuckled in an easy, downplaying the value of his present.

What he said about it being a gift for becoming a lord made no sense as Alexander made him a noble in the first place for being his friend.

The title was the gift.

And thus Alexander's claim made it sound like he was gifting Camius a gift for getting a gift from him.

And this irony did not escape Camius who gave a wry smile, "Doc, you never give anything for free? So what's the catch?"

Knowing Alexander, he dreaded what he would demand of him as he understood that with such a huge prize, naturally the challenge must match or even exceed it.

'Dammit, if I had known he had laid such a trap for me, I wouldn't have ever read the darn thing in the first place,' Camius even started to regret that he had learned to read, something that Alexander taught with much effort.

"Haha, you would not be my spymaster if you couldn't have figured out at least that much," Alexander chuckled a small, sly smile.

Then his voice quickly returned to a light breezy tone, "But don't worry, it's not a trap. It's a tool."

"A tool?" Camius failed to make the connection with the word wine, the word tool.

"Yes, a tool for you to use," Alexander repeated the saying with a nod.

And then delineated, "You will be given a select street of the city to patrol. And that will be a very special street because on that street will be one shop that will sell a special kind of wine. All its staff will be your men and the building above the shop will be your spy headquarters."

Pausing a bit, he continued, "The official story will be that you are a corrupt official that took advantage of a winemaker's weakness and made him share his secrets with you. And in this way, you will come to own a share of the shop. And according to that story, the building above the shop will be your and that shopkeeper's residence."

Alexander thus gave Camius a very solid alibi as such an arrangement was the norm in the city, a shopkeeper's shop would usually double as his dwelling.

This was because of several reasons like:

1. Halving the rent he would have otherwise had to pay if he owned two pieces of property.
2. Free security at night as the owner himself could guard the place instead of relying on the city guards who were usually the biggest thieves out there.
3. Less commuting time to work, ability to give a nice place for frequent customers and suppliers to rest and give refreshments.
4. And the existence of free labor like his wife and children to help out in the shop if the need arose.

Camius was jubilant at the powers and conveniences he was being provided.

But instead of saying the same hackneyed platitudes of gratitude that Alexander had heard a million times before, he decided to make some teasing remarks, referring to his back story of a corrupt official.

Chapter 255 Camius's Task

"Doc, today you pronounced me incompetent, and now I'm corrupt too!" Camius had a playful, wry smile, finding his cover both funny and a bit demeaning.

"Heh, what's the matter? Afraid no girl will ever want to marry you!" Cambyeses could not help but join in, sending a mirthful taunt at Camius.

Alexander too said his part, "Haha, yes, yes. As a lord, you must get a few little devils as soon as possible. I look eagerly forward to it."

Alexander's playful teasing did not deter Camius, as not to be outdone, Camius also countered, "Well said, doc. I was thinking about Mean. What do you say?"

Camius said this knowing the duo's relationship; thus, this was an attempt to poke at Alexander and Cambyes.

"Hahaha," This was Cambyes, who found the mere mention of it belly-hurtlingly funny, and began to laugh so hard at his ridiculous proposal that she almost fell off the couch.

"Hehe, I would love to. But I don't want to arrest Mean for murder," Alexander too knew this was simply Camius's harmless banter and so answered with a light-hearted joke of his own.

Mean hated Camius's guts and Alexander dreaded how that short spicy pepper would react if he seriously said this.

"Haha, Mean will likely kill you after she's killed Camius," Finally getting her breath back, Cambyes said this to Alexander.

"Or master and Lord Camius can share Mean. Like in a devil's triangle," Ophenia also gave in to the temptation of joining the fun and made a lewd innuendo.

And this got another round of boisterous laughter from Cambyes while the two men grimaced at the mere mention of it.

It took a while for the crowd to settle down after which Alexander urged, "Anyway, let's get to the topic."

"The reason why I'm giving you this wine recipe is because it will have multiple benefits for you,"

Raising his index finger, he began, "First, and in my opinion, the most important benefit is that this business will let you get into contact with a type of group we have little ability to spy on right now- the merchants."

"Sure, we can glimpse at other nobles using Pasha Farzah's network of maids, butlers, and stable boys," Alexander admitted, "But this only gives us the look at nobles, not on their territory and more importantly it's people."

"And that's what I want, a more complete picture of the entire situation. And for that, we need to link our spy network with the kingdom's trade network." Alexander claimed.

'There he goes again. It's not even the first point and he's wanting ridiculous things,' Camius lampooned at Alexander's tall demand, knowing his ambitious master was just getting started.

Alexander's orders for Camius to tap into the kingdom's trade hub as a means to spy on others was one of his greatest motives for making Camius a businessman and he emphasized this greatly.

Because Alexander knew that merchants were the best way to gather information at any period of history.

These people, with their horses and carts and trade caravans, could cover vast distances swiftly, inconspicuously, and easily without much barriers to entry to towns and cities, drawing more attention to the goods they sell rather than to actual themselves.

And in this way, through the process of making this journey, they could build strong and natural interpersonal relationships with a vast number of people from all walks of life, getting others to easily spill secrets that would be monumentally hard to accurately get using force,

A merchant by the nature of his job would have to deal with a myriad of people along his journey, from the lower strata from whom he would usually buy his product, to the a bit more affluent members like artisans and guards, to even the nobles themselves if his product was desirable enough, thus letting him touch every social class in the society.

And every people that a merchant interacted with, was a potential source of information.

Alexander thus finished by ordering Camius, "The vast untapped mine of information that the merchants possess, we must get that capability. We must tap into that vast network. And so you are to use this wine as a springboard to help Zanzan achieve that."

"You are the boss doc," Camius replied in a placid, nonchalant voice. having by now grown numb to Alexander's exorbitant demands.

In this time and age, becoming a merchant was easier than it sounded.

Because there were no real maps, and roads were few and far between, mostly between very large cities, one would basically have to find a trade route by himself.

This trade route would have to contain people that want one's product, is relatively easy to access with one's horse and cart, preferably has no competition, has adequate lodging and replenishment facilities, and ideally also sells a unique product one can buy to sell somewhere further along the way.

And they would have to do this all using the shortest route possible, as the length of the route, would drastically affect the price of the product.

Thus ticking all these criteria was never an easy task and so those handfuls that were lucky enough to figure one such out would naturally zealously guard them,

'Where am I gonna find a trusty, loyal merchant willing to share his trade route with me,' Camius felt a headache coming.

Listening to Alexander's demands, it was clear he did not want him to just set up shop and sell wine there but export it through a train of ships and caravans.

But that was a problem for Camius to solve, not Alexander.

"If he is going to be a businessman, is there a need for him to be a policeman? Will he even have the time?" Cambyes asked slightly worried.

"The entire business will be done by Camius's men, and led, on the surface, by the shopkeeper he chooses. That man will be the public face of the company while Camius will always be in the shadows." Alexander announced.

Further saying, "Remember, Camius is a lord now. So, he will only need to be the patron of the business and nobody will ask questions."

"Hmm, yes. That does make sense," Cambyses was convinced as this was the norm.

Nobles typically saw themselves beneath their status to engage in trade, especially peddling wares, by themselves, and usually sponsored various merchants to do it for them.

And merchants were happy to give a portion of their earnings to such people because being able to call oneself under patronage, and thus protection of a noble was like wearing a bulletproof social vest.

Their entry into any friendly and neutral city would be minimal or even free, city guards would give them a wide berth, and bandits seeing a caravan with the house emblem of a noble house would think thrice before attacking it, as opposed to a lone, statusless merchant.

"The wine shop will not just help you gather more information." Alexander began again, and raising his long finger, he listed, "Secondly, it will also help you legitimize your recruiting process. You could take people in the name of hiring workers for making wine but train them as covert operatives." "You could also make them start as workers and if they are loyal and skilled enough, invite them to become spies, and no one will be none the wiser."

His ring finger rose at this point, "Thirdly, your wine business will make many places previously not accessible open. Entering and leaving cities, and even other countries will be made much easier if you have an iconic product to sell. Not to mention that if you have a branch shop in another city, spies and collaborators might be able to seek refuge at these places."

Pausing to see if Camius was still paying attention, Alexander then said, pointing the pinky up, "Fourth, the money from the business can help fund the organization. The profits will be split forty percent to me, twenty percent to you, and forty percent for the men to cover all their expenses."

"Twenty percent for me is too much. And you not taking fifty percent is too little," Camius wanted to change the terms to make it more profitable for Alexander.

But Alexander simply said, "Forty percent is enough for me, And if you want less money, then you can use the remaining money to expand your spy network even further."

Camius only lightly smiled.

Alexander then finished by raising his thumb and saying his last point, "Also, once you have made enough contributions, I can use the excuse of you introducing me to such a good wine to promote you, to Talukder (Viscount). So work hard!"

This bait worked wonders as Camius gave a wide grin and nodded, pleased at the promise of his promotion.

"I will try my best," Camius promised.

Though the amount of work Alexander had sneakily dumped on him was not lost on the man.

Hence the clever mercenary internally lampooned, 'It's my first job and he's already set up grand goals for me to achieve. What luck to work under him,'

Chapter 256 Alexander's Wary About Camius

The scale of Alexander's demands for Camius was not lost on the man.

Camius, though might one him to be rowdy and boisterous externally, was always a calm man on the inside, and when he thought back on the challenges he would have to overcome to get that promotion and become a talukdar (viscount), his zeal for work substantially withered.

This was only his first real task as the chief of the NIA (National Intelligence Agency) and it was already such a tall order.

So, who knew what tall mountains he would be called to climb in the future for Alexander?

But then Camius remembered who his boss was.

This was classic Alexander, always handing out rich rewards, but also demanding the utmost excellence in return.

"Remember to choose a suitable street to set your shop at, and employ a trustworthy merchant." Alexander gave some last-minute advice and feeling he had basically said all he needed to say, he decided to excuse the man for the time being.

"Well, then, I will not keep you here any longer," Alexander said, adding, "And I will join you for the interrogations a few hours later."

"Okay. I will let Cambyses know the street I chose for my shop, so I get my patrol in that street," Camius made a suggestion by himself which Alexander nodding approved.

"Well then take care, my lord," Camius afterward performed a noble's bow, and promptly showed himself out.

As the memory of Camius leaving the room still lingered in the minds of the remaining people, Alexander suddenly asked his two women, "So, what do you think of the conversation just now?"

"..." Both of them were confused by the question.

What did they think?

They thought it was all pretty normal.

Seeing their confusion, Alexander decided to elucidate, "What I mean is that with the powers I gave Camius just now, he will have total control of what my eyes see and what my ears hear. What do you think about that?" He asked with a light smile.

"Alex, if you are thinking that Camius will betray you, you should throw that filthy thought right out." Cambyes almost shouted this out with a very exasperated tone, finding even the mere mention of the possibility distasteful.

"Of course, I'm sure Camius is willing to die for me a thousand times," Alexander in a breezy tone soothed Cambyes.

But then ominously added, "...For now."

"Is master worried about the future?" Ophenia asked with a light frown.

"Yes," Alexander nodded, asking "Who can say if he will feel the same a decade from now or two decades from now?"

"Tha..." Cambyes seemed to want to say something but was interceded by Alexander.

"Time has a nasty side effect of warping people to unimaginable shapes." He said, adding, "When Camius will remain in power for decades, having the eager ear of the most powerful man in the kingdom, and all such sensitive information at his fingertips, who can say the embers of ambition will not smolder?"

And he then very heroically said, "And I must stop that from ever happening."

Alexander had handed the NIA all the power to spy on the civilians, military, and nobilities mostly because he was short-handed.

But after rethinking for a day, Alexander felt that handing Camius so much unilateral power was not right.

He had given the man the means, the right, and the opportunity to grow his spy empire as he wished, and though he had given it only because he very much trusted Camius and was very confident that the man would not back-stab him, who would see the future?

"Alex, just as you said, the possibility of it happening is decades in the future. So, why are you talking about it now? Why are you talking about taking actions against something you literally just created." Cambyes had begun to find Alexander's over-cautiousness, bordering on paranoia irritating.

Alexander certainly did not miss the annoyance in Cambyes's voice.

But he who learned from history knew better.

Particularly there was the example of the Ottoman Pargalı Ibrahim Pasha, who was the first Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire appointed by Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent.

He was born a Christian who was enslaved during his youth and not much unlike Alexander and Camius's story, he and Suleiman became close friends in their youths.

Thus after Suleiman's ascension to power, he was appointed by the king as the Grand Vizier and remained in office for the next 13 years.

Ibrahim particularly showed off his skills on the diplomatic front, his work with the Western Christendom being a complete success, evidenced by such as convincing Charles V to turn Hungary into an Ottoman vassal state and making a deal with Francis I that gave France favorable trade rights within the Ottoman Empire in exchange for joint action against the Habsburgs.

Ibrahim did this by using a variety of tactics to negotiate favorable deals with the leaders of the Catholic powers, the most effective tactic being by portraying himself as "the real power behind the Ottoman Empire".

And as his power and wealth grew, attaining a level of authority and influence rivaled by only a handful of other grand viziers of the Empire, so did his arrogance.

And he behaved as if he were in charge, not the Sultan.

This was most evident by the fact that the Venetian diplomats even referred to him as "Ibrahim the Magnificent", a play on Suleiman's usual sobriquet.

And when this reached Suleiman's ears, this deeply troubled the Sultan.

And after trying a few times to curb the man's arrogance to no avail, one day, after finishing dinner with the Sultan, when Ibrahim Pasha was about to go to bed, he was suddenly seized in his bedroom on Suleiman's orders and promptly executed, with all his property (much of which was gifted to him by the Sultan) confiscated by the state.

Thus ended the life of this ambitious man and a friendship that should have lasted for a lifetime.

It took Ibrahim only thirteen years to turn from a loyal friend to threatening his lord's position.

So how could Alexander be sure that Camius would not turn the same?

If thirteen was not enough, what about twenty-six, or even thirty-nine?

Camius after plenty of time on his hand after all.

He was just twenty-one, and justifiably, Alexander dreaded to think the kind of power his spymaster would be able to attain at the age of sixty.

With so much at one's fingertips, it would take only a tiny spark, an insignificant egging from any malicious forces, or even a causal suggestion to doom Camius and Alexander along an irrevocable path.

And Alexander wanted to stop that before such a possibility could even take birth.

But Alexander did not give such detailed explanations to the girls.

Instead, he only said, "True I made Camius the head right now. But I also want cover for 'what if' scenarios."

"You can say what ifs all day long. What if this happened? What if that happened?" Cambyeses was very vocal about her displeasure, saying at last, "What if the sky fell tomorrow?"

She certainly did not like this ever-suspicious part of Alexander's nature.

Alexander only gave a helpless smile as he believed being the man of the house he certainly had to take the worst-case scenario into account.

He did not have the luxury of being as wishy-washy as his wife.

But he chose not to pour more fuel into this topic by debating with Cambyeses.

Instead, he switched topics, "Cam, in addition to leading the police, I want you to form a spy branch attached to it. It will be called the detective branch and it will investigate crimes and potential criminals."

Alexander's use of the word potential criminals left a wide degree of interpretation as all innocent men could be potential criminals

Yes, this was Alexander basically asking Cambyeses to form a secret police with the authority to arrest anyone, something that he had also told Camius to do.

And thus, by creating duplicating agencies, Alexander hoped that he would not be only reliant on Camius for his intelligence.

"Potential criminals? You mean spies?" You want me to do the same job as Camius?" Cambyeses was certainly no fool.

"Yes, but not exactly." Alexander lightly smiled, explaining, "Camius will mainly spy on foreign lands, while you will only focus on our people."

This made sense to Cambyses and she nodded in agreement.

But what Alexander did not tell her was how blurred such definitions could be.

A simple example would be a traitor leaking information to a third party.

If that person was a citizen of Alexander, then as a citizen living under Alexander's rule, he would fall under Cambyses's jurisdiction.

But it could also be argued that as the information was being leaked to a foreign power, naturally it should go to Camius.

Thus a rivalry will develop between the NIA and the detective branch, where these people will compete with each other over resources such as money, political clout, glory, and peerage.

And when there's such an enemy, naturally all the energy will go towards fighting the other, with no time to plan any rebellions.

Chapter 257 Alexander's Worldview (Part-1)

Alexander's reason for creating duplicating spy agencies could be described using a single sentence, 'Some spies are needed to spy on the spies.'

In this way, Alexander hoped that in the event of a rebellion, it would be very likely that plans of such treacherous actions will be leaked by spies within that spy agency, each ratting out the other for glory and honor.

This was the same case in his previous world, where all countries had multiple duplicative spy services that did very similar things and who were actively encouraged to compete for funding and favor.

For example, the USA had so many letter intelligence services, CIA, NSA, FBI, DIA, the list could go on, who did a lot of the same thing and thus could be much more efficient if everyone worked under one giant organization.

But then that organization might get too much power.

And thus this was broken up and each of the intelligence services zealously protected their intelligence so others could not steal credit for themselves.

And when the intelligence service was not broken, like in the Soviet Union's KGB, they could oust leaders and even stage coups, like they tried to do by arresting Gorbachev and attempting to grab power in a last-ditch attempt to hold the Soviet Union together.

Alexander kept these lessons of history to himself and did not delineate such harsh realities to the young eighteen-year-old girl for now.

She would have her whole life ahead of her to learn it after all.

Alexander thus then turned to Ophenia, "Tayin, I also want you to tell the girls under you to keep their ears open for information. Men are especially loose mouth in bed."

Using prostitutes for spying was the oldest trick in the book and as a time-tested method, Alexander would certainly make use of it.

"Of course, master," Ophenia had no problem with this, adding with a little giggle, "Even master is no different."

She was of course referring to what Alexander told her about Cambyses in that council room.

This drew a rueful smile from Alexander who was finding Ophenia getting bolder and bolder by the day, finally breaking out of her polite, refined, fake facade.

Alexander was certainly very happy to see this, though he would have preferred it if Ophenia had chosen to do it a different way.

"Oh? What did he say? Tell me Tayin!" Cambyes's eyes were sparkling at the potential dirt.

Alexander was usually very tight-lipped so the girl was certainly interested to know what he had let slip.

"Hehehe," Ophenia only giggled, showing all her pearly whites as she withheld the potential bickering topic.

And seeing the situation about to worsen, Alexander quickly decided to divert the topic, choosing to use a piece of very juicy news.

News about Mikaya.

"I could not find the time to tell you yesterday, Tayin, but I promised Mikaya she could work for you," Alexander said.

"Work for me?" Ophenia naturally did not understand this without context, causing a slight frown to appear on her forehead.

"Yes, work," Alexander repeated with a small nod and then filled in the two women on the conversation he had had with Mikaya yesterday.

"....And that's what I meant by that," Alexander finished to the absolutely stunned looks of the two girls.

"Y..you...can't be serious." Cambyes could not even imagine that a noblewoman or for that fact, any woman would be willing to do the things Alexander promised her.

She was even looking forward to it!

'Crazy bitch,' Cambyses gave the silver-haired beauty this nickname.

If she did not know Alexander better, Cambyses would have thought that Alexander was pulling her leg.

On the other hand, Ophenia, who had seen much more of such stuff, was much calmer, "If master wishes, I can arrange that." She promised, adding, "In the temple, I have seen similar things happen."

"Some free women would hide their identity to come to the temple and either because of being frustrated, not loving their husbands, or just wanting to experience the thrill of it. They would drown themselves in the bodily pleasures the temple offered, and there are many tales of women who would even permanently join the temple afterwards."

Ophenia then finished by saying. "They would even pay the temple money for the chance, sleeping with not just priests, but regular devotees too. In fact, this was an open secret."

Alexander raised an eyebrow at this and wondered, "Oh? Then how did they hide their identity? What kind of disguise did they use?"

Because Mikaya would certainly require one and this was Alexander's biggest worry regarding her-hiding Mikaya's identity from the public.

Alexander then listed what his preferred disguise should be able to do.

"Mikaya's hair needs to be dyed. And preferably it needs to be able to be washed very quickly, within a few hours, max. Any ideas? Alexander asked Ophenia.

This was because he didn't want the twin princesses or worse the Queen mother questioning why she colored her hair black.

"Mmm, no problem master. This request was also made by many of the women in the temple and I know of a dye that does not wash with water but instantly does with alcohol." Ophenia promised.

"Really! That's fantastic!" Alexander was very pleased by this convenient solution.

Hearing the duo so casually discuss Mikaya and being dead serious about allowing her to perform the things Mikaya wanted to, Cambyses felt her eyes being opened and she felt nothing but disdain and disgust for Pasha Farzah's youngest daughter.

"Heh, where does that whore get off chiding you when she's like that?" Cambyses loudly cursed Mikaya.

She still had not let Mikaya off for mocking her husband at the dinner table tonight, and after knowing how base Mikaya was, naturally she considered her to be very low and degrading.

"Did what Mikaya's said bother you that much?" Alexander asked with a placid smile.

"Well..yeah," Cambyses said in an obvious tone, and then, thinking that she had noticed a pattern, she asked, "Alex, I noticed it even before. You never defend yourself, why?"

Cambyses certainly did not enjoy seeing her husband getting bullied and wondered why Alexander did not put Mikaya in her place.

"Hahaha," Alexander gave a very frank laugh at the question, and lightly asked, "Defend from what? From who?"

"Do I flare up when they call me a bumpkin, or slave, or peasant?"

"Do I hiss and puff when they snigger and backbite behind my back?"

"Do I throw a tantrum when they deride and mock me?"

Alexander then turned to Cambyses and asked simply, "Why?"

"....." Cambyses and Ophenia were silent.

Alexander then advised, "Listen Cam, and I want you to remember what I say very well. 'The world will never let us forget who and what we are. So wear it like armor and no one will be able to hurt you'."

Alexander took this quote from a famous TV show.

This deep statement sent the two girls into a poignant thought as they remunerated what Alexander had just told them.

And the more they thought about it the more they understood that no matter what they did, they would always be seen as outsiders by the Adhanian nobility.

People of low birth, barbarians, and Thesians-the enemy, these labels would always be plastered to them and it seemed according to Alexander, the strategy was not to bother.

To treat the insults like water washing of the skin, harmless and irrelevant.

The reason why this not did bother Alexander was because as a modern man, someone from the 21st century, he, a bit arrogantly, saw all the people here as less civilized and less knowledgeable than him.

There were smart people, much smarter people than Alexander even, but he didn't think anyone was as knowledgeable as him.

Thus whenever anyone mocked him about status and bloodline, he only thought, 'What do you know about my status? I lived in a technological world you people could not even imagine, ate food you could not even fathom, and had access to luxuries you people are unable to even grasp the mere concept of.

'So, how dare you people living in mud huts, eating barely hand to mouth and still shitting under the sun think you pass judgment on me?'

Alexander would taunt and mock them in return.

To him, whatever these people said went in one ear and out the next, as other than handful ones, most were non-existent in Alexander's eyes.

A good analogy for Alexander would be like if a person hit someone for no reason.

Naturally, that person would be very angry and most likely remember the incident for the rest of his life.

But if a mosquito bites him, he would struggle to remember the incident a minute later.

Why?

Because that mosquito and its bite both were insignificant.

And this was the same way Alexander saw the people here.

He simply did not care that the people were saying such things, because, according to him, the very things they were accusing him of, he also considered to be that- Base, ignorant, and barbaric.

Chapter 258 Alexander's Worldview (Part-2)

It was not only Alexander's thoughts that were very different from everyone else's but there was also the fact his worldview about the status of nobility and bloodline was also vastly incompatible.

While the people of this time saw the status of being a noble as a god-given honor and believed in the superiority of bloodlines, Alexander was half a technocrat, believing that the more knowledgeable a person was, the more respect and recognition he deserved.

He put science and reason on a pedestal, not dogma and ignorance.

Thus Alexander simply saw his noble title as a tool to control the populace and thus improve his life and those close to him.

So naturally, he would not fight over such a trivial thing as a nobleman's honor.

And the only time Alexander would try to defend himself from being mocked would be if he was attacked publicly, as his prestige among the people was paramount.

"So, should we just let them hit us? Wearing only armor makes one into a punching bag, Where's our spear?' Cambyses was reluctant to just take the beating.

And though Ophenia did not say anything, she too seemed to share Cambyses's mindset.

"Haha, of course not," Alexander chuckled, and then said, "What you should do depends on the context."

Raising his index finger, he detailed, "If you are in a private setting, with just the two of you, call them names as they called you. I'm sure you know some choice ones that those stuck-up nobles have no idea of," Alexander smirked, knowing that these refined nobles might not even understand some of the curses the lower-class people use.

Afterward came up his long finger, "If it's in a type of social gathering like a party or banquet, or one like the dinners we have, simply ignore that person. Let them say their piece."

And lastly came his ring finger, "But if it's in front of your subordinates, if it's in the public or in a place where people other than the nobility is watching, simply say, 'We will talk when you have learned to talk like a noble' and then simply terminate the exchange and walk out."

And Alexander then gave his reason for this kind of action, "The reason why you must do the last option is because you must never appear weak or insulted in front of people who follow or idolize you."

"Why, you ask?" Alexander himself asked the rhetorical question, and answered, "Because such a thing will eat at your powerbase."

'Powerbase?' The girls wondered, where the word powerbase came from

And so Alexander clarified, "Remember Cam, you or I or anyone else at the top for that matter, they are only able to give commands and instructions, but they can't do much else."

He listed, "Leaders don't wield swords, shields or spears. They don't collect taxes, they don't build roads, they don't police the populace and they don't even farm their own food. These are all done by men and women who the leaders command."

Alexander then posed a series of philosophical questions, "But then why do men and women, fear, respect and obey your command? Isn't anything you say just different vibrations of air coming out of your mouth? Everyone can blow air out of their mouth, so why should the men and women under you follow your voice and not any others? Why are you so special?"

"..." Neither Ophenia nor Cambyses had ever thought about it like that and these questions made them ask themselves, why they, possessing the same two eyes, hands, and legs, were any different from the slaves that slaved away in the fields under their orders.

Cambyses and Ophenia thought about the answer for a while but could not really figure out what made them special.

And so Alexander gave them the answer they were searching for, "People obey you because the people believe you are special. They obey because they believe you have the power to make them do it. They believe you are right and they must obey!"

He then pointed his thick fingers at Cambyses, "And the key point is -'Believe'. They believe that the nobles are special."

Alexander at last finished by saying, "But that belief will be shaken if they see their noble lord being bullied and humiliated by another. And if they lose respect, if they think their boss is not any different from them, if they will lose the reverence, they might begin to see the nobles as replaceable."

"And then rebellion would soon follow!" Alexander gravely warned, causing the girls to shudder.

They also began to appreciate Alexander's ability to deeply penetrate a core issue, past the flimsy outer layer of a circumstance, in this case, a noble's seemingly vain way of life which had much greater social

implications than one would imagine, and began to understand that this was one of the reasons why Alexander was able to break free of his shackles.

It was not just because he knew many things, but because he saw himself as not too different from his masters.

Whereas other slaves saw their masters as the end all be all, Alexander knew these so-called masters were just flesh and bones like him, and thus had a mindset to free himself.

Alexander believed the chains were only on him for the time being and so he worked to unshackle himself and voila, he was made free.

And this mindset was at play even now, as evidenced by his relationship with Ptolomy, whom he only saw as a transitional master until he eventually usurped him.

Whereas the girls, who were also once subservient to others, always did whatever their superior told them to, without any questions or thoughts.

Even now, Ophelia and Cambyses, although would occasionally argue with Alexander, they would never dare to disobey one of his direct commands, even if they did not agree with it.

Thus, today's lesson was a priceless lesson for the girls.

"*Sigh*, to think such simple things were so complicated," Cambyses felt a slight headache at the intricacies of the nobility.

"As expected of master, to see such deep thought in such seemingly shallow actions. Tayin's eyes have been opened," Ophelia was very impressed by Alexander's detailed analysis.

Alexander had managed to see things Ophelia, even as a noble was unable to see.

And knowing his background, naturally reinforced the girl's belief in Alexander's claimed divinity.

Alexander then continued for a while longer. teaching the girls a few more nuggets of life lessons and then suddenly pivoted to a topic that was swimming in his mind for quite some time.

"Ohh, Cam! So when do you wanna get married?" Alexander casually asked.

"Married?" Cambyes was confused because she had assumed that they were already married.

She did mate with him after all.

"Yeah! The ceremony," Alexander clarified, saying, "I know that we consummated but I was still hoping for an official ceremony."

"It would not only cement our relationship in a formal way but also let others know about us. The population would know you as my main wife, the nobles would know that your children will be my successors and it would be a special day for us." Alexander very eagerly said.

According to the culture of Thesos, there were basically three types of marriage.

The first type was the known to all type, where a woman's father would choose a suitable partner, pay her dowry to the man, and without any kind of opinion from the girl, would be shipped off to live with her in-laws.

All high-level marriages were of this sort.

The second type was the most unique one and would occur if a man fell in love with a woman and wanted to ask her hand in marriage.

The man would go to the woman's father, ask for his daughter's hand in marriage and if the father found the boy to his liking would name a price for his daughter.

The two would haggle and once the price had been set, the daughter would be 'married' off to the man.

The reason why this time the man paid the dowry was to prove to the father that he was financially capable of supporting his daughter and this money would be that woman's exclusive right, unable to be touched by anyone- not her husband, nor her father or even her sons.

This was specifically a big deal in Thesos, because, without this exception, women were not allowed to own any other type of property.

And thus finding love marriages in Thesos was as rare as finding true love.

And the last type was called a marriage of convenience.

In this type of marriage, a couple would start living together in the same house and if they had continuously stayed together for more than a year, then they were declared as husbands and wives.

Almost all lower-class marriages were such because, well, they were cheap.

After all, poor peasants were already struggling to make ends meet and so expensive marriages were not exactly on their wish list.

Chapter 259 Interrogation Camp

The third type of marriage was particularly preferred by the lower classes because if the couples were not married there would be no exchange of wealth even as gifts and in case the marriage fell out for some reason, there would be no hassle regarding the redistribution of the given money from either side.

And going by the descriptions of the three marriages, Cambyses and Alexander would have to be put in the third type of marriage.

But Alexander had one big objectionable point with this type of marriage.

And that was the use of the word 'continuous,' in the clause.

A couple had to continuously stay together for more than a year to be considered married.

And this 'loophole' was not unknown to the people of Thesos.

On the contrary, its use was so prevalent that it was in fact actual couples that were extremely rare among the lower strata of Thesos.

How they exploited this legal loophole was by making the girl stay at her parents' house three days every year, to avoid getting formally married.

This might seem antithetical to the whole endeavor, but such was done because it favored the woman's father.

This was because before a daughter was married, all her wealth belonged to her father, while after marriage it belonged to her husband.

And thus, by not marrying off his daughter, a father could hold onto all his daughter's wealth.

Hearing Alexander wanted to hold a party for her, Cambyses was naturally overjoyed and did not stand in ceremony.

So she very eagerly asked, "Ohhh! When do you have in mind? Soon?"

"Mmmm, how about the new year's day," Alexander felt the first of January was an auspicious date.

"Sure, no problem," Cambyses beamed a huge grin, looking very forward to her special day.

"Congratulations, mistress, master," Ophenia quickly wished the couple her best wishes, though saying she too did not wish for such an event would be a lie.

And her wishes were instantly answered as Cambyses strongly hugged her and turned to Alexander, "But Alex, what about Tayin? And Mean?"

Cambyes did not want to leave these two out.

"Haha, of course, I will marry Tayin as well. She is my sacred priestess and must be married to me," Alexander promised, causing Ophenia's eyes to shine like the stars.

Which girl never dreamed of being dressed in a beautiful bridal gown?

"Slave is unworthy," She humbly bowed, causing Alexander to chuckle and say,

"Haha, do need to be such. You and I are bound by fate and I will marry you in spring."

Then he added, "The reason why I do not plan to marry you all on the same day is because I want each of your marriage days to be special."

"Master's grace is truly gracious," Though Ophenia had kept managed to keep a straight face, inside her heart had squealed in joy at Alexander's consideration.

As a girl, she naturally had a selfish desire to monopolize her man.

But since realities would never allow her to do that, she at least wanted to do it at least once a year.

"I will marry Mean also later," Alexander then reassured Cambyes, though the matter of Gelene was left tactfully unsaid.

He then raised another issue, this time related to health.

"I noticed we have been eating very rich food lately. So, have you girls been exercising properly?" Alexander asked.

"That...." The awkward pause gave the answer.

So Alexander instructed, "You must regularly exercise. It not only keeps your body beautiful but fit and healthy as well."

Having suffered from rickets in her childhood, Cambyses did not need more encouragement and so obediently replied, "We will make time from tomorrow."

"Mmm, good," Alexander then discussed few minor details with the two girls and after noticing the time, felt that he should meet up with Camius by now.

And thus he excused himself.

Alexander made his way to the barracks holding cells and soon found what he was looking for.

Because just outside the barracks, there were close to twenty stumps dug into the ground, all containing a man tied to them.

These men were bound and upright, standing up with both hands and feet securely fastened to the wooden stakes and shivering.

This was because they were totally bare and soaking wet, courtesy of a few uniformed men who would occasionally and very liberally throw buckets of water at them, causing the former to scream in agony.

"My lord," Camius came up to greet Alexander and he soon invited him inside.

"Any talked?" Alexander casually inquired as he made himself comfortable inside the room.

"They are squirming...but not yet," Camius reported.

"Mmmm, keep it up then," Alexander was confident that these men would talk.

They might be tough men who were no strangers to violence, but having to be naked outside soaking wet for hours was a whole different kind of torture.

But why was Camius interrogating them though it was the police who had captured these men?

Because under Alexander's directive, Cambyses had sent the men visually selected by Camius to this outpost of the barracks, where they were being made to sing.

As Camius and he talked, suddenly, a thought made its way to him.

He thus instructed, "Take three of those men out and place them inside. And then instruct your men to loudly say this, 'We already got what we needed from those three, so why do we need the others?' That should loosen some tongues,"

"That's a great idea, my lord," Camius happily praised the proposal.

And then cleverly added his own idea, "Oh! What if we also switched some of the men with ours, so they will shout and promise to give up everything? This will no doubt cause some of the real ones to defect as well!"

Camius had learned this from a similar trick Alexander would use, where the latter would hire people to his gathering to act as cheerleaders and stir the crowd.

"Oh? Will that work?" Alexander found the plan quite good, save for minor details.

"Yes, I'm confident." Camius nodded heavily, explaining, "It's dark now so nobody will really notice, and besides, it's not like the gangs know each other to the point they can identify the members just by their voice."

This sounded very good and so Alexander gave the go-ahead.

He then stayed for a while seeing the operations unfold and casually talking to Camius, and even sitting down for two interrogations, though he just quietly sat and let the interrogation officer do his thing.

And the gist of the information was just like he had expected, it was the temple that egged them on and when Alexander did not seem interested in hiring these gangs, they naturally chose that side.

In one particular interrogation, Alexander oversaw the intelligence extraction of one very fat and oily prisoner.

"Tell that Jakqum slave that his days are numbered," He fiercely barked at Alexander, not knowing who he was.

This was also by coincidence the very same man Cambyses had captured, and the word Jakqum in Azhak means a nobody or a vagabond, kind of like a John Doe, but with a much worse connotation.

He was clearly referring to Alexander as a stray and thus got rewarded with being sent back to 'chill'.

After some time of that, the night began to deepen and sleep was beginning to attack Alexander.

So he decided to excuse himself. "Okay, I think I will be heading back. Keep up the good work."

"Yes, pasha, please take care." Camius gave a heavy bow.

In such formal settings, Camius was always very deferential towards Alexander, much different from his private manners.

"Umm, I will give everyone tomorrow off. So give the confession report by dawn," Alexander casually hummed a spartan deadline as he saw himself out, causing Camius to subtly grimace.

'F you, slave driver,' Camius cursed inside his heart but did not fight it openly, instead only nodding in agreement and saying, "Yes, my lord. It will at your desk before dawn."

Camius knew that he could complete it if he pulled an all-nighter and thus, since it was possible, if Camius were to grumble to Alexander, the latter would only raise his palms and say the hackneyed words, "If you have the time to argue, you have the time to get the job done."

And so it was more prudent for Camius to start making the men squeal and sing as soon as possible.

While Camius was doing just that, Alexander and his bodyguards were quickly riding back to his estate, a thick blanket of fog, almost impenetrable to the eyes beyond a few meters shrouding them all the way, as the biting cold winds cut through even their warm, heavy woolen coat, causing many men to subconsciously tighten their thick jackets.

'I wonder if I could have done any better than those poor sods,' Alexander shuddered at the thought as he off-handedly wondered if he could have withstood the torture Camius was administering.

He had always been weak to the cold.

In his previous life, he would love to slip under his blanket with a hot mug of cocoa the moment the temperature dropped below freezing, curling up like a cat and refusing to get out unless absolutely needed.

'Probably not,' Alexander thus concluded, feeling withstanding the cold might have been too much.

In fact, the design of this interrogation was also based on Alexander's perceived notion of the discomfort that extreme cold caused, feeling that since he could not withstand it, maybe many others could not too.

And with these accompanying thoughts, the entourage soon reached the manor and Alexander quickly made his way to the room, where a surprise was waiting for him.

Chapter 260 Claiming Mean Fully (R-18)

Alexander entered his room close to midnight but strangely found it lit.

It was unusual because when Alexander would be late to bed, usually Cambyses would go to bed before him.

She used to insist on staying up before, but after Alexander's repeated scolding, and due to her own body's lulling, she decided to follow such.

"Mean? Where's Cam?" Alexander asked as he got rid of his heavy clothes, finding some patches of his clothes wet and damp, possibly due to the extreme fog outside.

"Mistress is in my room," Mean lightly pitter-pattered her way to Alexander, helping to collect and properly store the expensive clothes.

"And why are you in my room then?" Alexander sent a teasing smirk at Mean, causing Mean to blush furiously.

She was gorgeously dressed in a pink tutu, with just two thin strings holding it over her beautiful, smooth shoulder as the small dress tightly hugged her petite figure, with the skirt ending at half her thigh, thus letting Alexander marvel at her creamy legs, gleaming like ivory.

Neither was in any doubt over why she was there.

"Does my little minx want me to destroy her asshole today?" Alexander in a husky voice whispered beside Mean's ears.

"....." Mean only clenched her teeth as her ears turned even redder at Alexander's vulgar words, fueled even more by the fact that Alexander had fiercely grabbed her naked butt under the cloth and started poking her puckered hole using his middle finger directly.

Alexander was being much rougher than last time and Mean leaked like a broken faucet in anticipation.

"Filthy girl, why are bare there, *smack*" Alexander grinned and gave a hard spank causing Mean to clench her moan.

"Sla...slave wanted to be ready for master," Mean wiggled her butt coyly to tempt Alexander.

And so with a smirk, Alexander said, "Naughty girls like you need a good spanking."

Alexander then picked up Mean in a princess carry and sat on the edge of his bed, making Mean lay over his lap.

"Kyaahh, no," Mean felt his child-like position quite humiliating, especially when she felt Alexander flip up her skirt to reveal her butt.

"*Smack*, what an ass you have, my horny bunny," Alexander slapped the beautiful flesh, soaking in the tight shape, thin, wet crack, and beautiful dirty hole.

"No..nooo, so embarrassing...don't look," Mean could certainly feel Alexander's scalding gaze on her most shameful holes and such close scrutiny made her mewl in shame.

But Alexander's heart blazed at being able to discipline this small, exquisite rump.

"So this is the naughty little butt that does not like to wear clothes," Alexander grabbed the small cheek and after giving it a good couple of squeezes, and loving the springiness of it, gave it a tight slap.

"*Smack* Mnnnn," Mean moaned at the rough play.

Alexander then in a hard voice ordered, "Count, *smack*"

"Ahhh...one," Mean squealed with shame and joy at the sound and stinging sensation, feeling like her butt was on fire.

"Do you enjoy it slave?" Alexander asked as he gave her another good smack, turning the flesh red.

"Yes..yes, so please more," Mean pleaded with haggard breaths.

Alexander's strong domineering strikes fueled her inner masochism and she wanted more, harder and faster.

Smack! Smack! Smack!

And thus came a rain of blows, threatening to snap Mean's hip as Alexander showed no mercy, loving how the little body would shake and sing under the hits, the fragrant little butt dancing under his palms.

"Mmmm, ahhhhh, oohhhh," The hard spanking was mixed with Mean's own lewd moans and shouts to produce a lewd note that turned the room into a lewd cavern, each edging Mean closer to release.

Each of Alexander's strikes seemed to make Mean moan even louder.

This was because the position Alexander had inadvertently put Mean was one of her deepest fantasies, to be spanked on the lap like a naughty girl.

This yearning stemmed from the fact she had always had a parent complex.

She had been sold as a slave by her own father under the urging of her stepmother, whom he had remarried after Mean's biological mother's death.

And thus deep down she had always longed for a father's love.

So, Alexander's strong, musky smell and tall, muscular stature had always attracted Mean, as she tried to fill that void using her lover.

"Yes, daddy, hit Mean's slutty tush. She's been a very bad girl," Mean moaned in joy as Alexander increased his hits.

'Well that's new,' Alexander said to himself at Mean's urging, and then continued to do not only that but also massaging it, kneading it, and caressing it, ultimately turning the butt red and hot.

And then to turn up the play even more, Alexander decided to entertain Mean another way.

"Ekkk, my butt..urggg it's going in my butt," Mean yelled in shock as she felt Alexander's thick middle digit poke directly into her pink hole and slowly invade her nether hole.

"What a tight hole!" Alexander marveled as he wiggled his finger in, loving the exquisite silky, hot squeeze.

"Noo...ahhh...don't...don't scratch inside my butt," Mean cried out in shame, getting a weird itch as Alexander's nails squirmed forward.

"*Smack*, don't clench your butt. We need to get you loosened up," Alexander ordered with a crisp hit.

"Arhhh..." But this only caused Mean to clench harder.

"Bad girl! Naughty girl!" Sensing the pressure increase, Alexander started raining blows on the flawless flesh, making her moan especially loud and maddening.

"Ahhh..no. Getting spanked and fingered in my butt feels too good, ahhh! Ekkkk, the finger is poking up...ohhhh!" Mean lewdly cried and clenched her butt even more, which caused Alexander to speed up his ministrations.

Alexander loved Mean's crispy butt, which was much more tight and elastic than the other girl's, giving his hand a stronger reaction.

Finally, after one too many spans, Mean arched her head back and screamed, "Ekkkk...coming...coming..ahhh..coming from my butt getting fingered and spanked..ohhhh!" and reached release, shaking and screaming at the huge release.

"Ha..ha..ha," It took a while for Mean to steady herself as she let out relieved pants of pleasure.

But Alexander was yet to start getting pleased and so he quickly flipped Mean upright and adjusted his spear right atop her wrinkled hole, slightly poking it, teasing the incoming onslaught as he asked, "Now, tell me what you want my slutty rabbit?"

That little orgasm was certainly not enough to douse Mean's lust and so she excitedly wiggled her butt, lewd water wetting her rear hole, "Ha..ha...Master, take that fat cock and turn this slave's asshole into your exclusive asspussy,"

"Good girl," Alexander lightly smiled and then, like that day, in one go skewered Mean, causing the girl to howl in pain and pleasure, to the point that she peed herself.

"Slutty minx, loosen up," Alexander felt the all too familiar sensation of Mean trying to snap his thing and he urged with clenched teeth.

"Ohhh...so thick...ahhh...my ass, it hurts. It feels like on fire...ahhh...more," The masochist girl flitted between pain and pleasure, letting out even fluids.

"Then have some more," Alexander then started immediately jack-hammering Mean's ass, causing Mean to sing at the top of her voice.

Alexander found Mean's turned to be tight and hot, and the rubbery, silky walls squeezing him tighter than anyone else had, requiring Alexander to fully concentrate to hold back his release.

"Your horny little bunny! You really are a piece of meat made to be fucked," Alexander talked dirty as he widened and explored Mean's canal, making the girl lose herself in the mind-bending pleasure.

"Ahghh, so good...my ass feels so good. It feels like my butt is being scraped out," Mean roared lewdly as she bounced on Alexander's lap, very eager to take in the huge rod to her deepest part.

Squelch! Squelch! Squelch!

A lewd, wet sound was made by the mixture of Mean's honey water. intestinal juices and flesh hitting one another made the action audible for all as Alexander used his little brother to fiercely pound the

rear tunnel, hitting the smooth stretchy walls with his bulbous red and making Mean constantly give a weird, lewd 'being filled-up feeling.

Finally, after a long time of exploring the new lands, Alexander decided to mark them as his exclusive territory.

"Arghh, cumming," Alexander launched his heavy, creamy load into the tight ass, causing Mean to give one last howl of pleasure.

"Arhhhh, me too...ohh..your cum is making my tummy feels so weird.." Mean felt that her belly was being inflated by the immense amount of cum released inside her and she came too.

As the two paused a bit to take a breather, Alexander lightly picked up Mean, releasing his dick with a distinctive *plop* sound and then with a little sadistic voice said, "Here! Now taste your own ass."

This was followed by Alexander grabbing Mean by the head and shoving her face into his groin, and fiercely face-fucking Mean moments later.

Mean very eagerly slurped up the nasty mixture, sucking down the remaining thick, fishy load and not minding the taste one bit.

And so soon Alexander deposited his second load into Mean's cute tummy.

Afterward he turned her over to taste her lewd cave and after savoring that he again moved to her ass.

In this way Alexander ravaged Mean for over two hours, the petite girl having all three of her holes filled multiple times, by the end of which Mean was just shivering and quivering under Alexander, letting out only incoherent low groans.

And by the time Mean fell asleep, she was eagle sprawled on her belly, her rear almost wide enough to fit a small ball and constantly leaking the creamy goodness, while a very content smile hang on her face.

"More daddy...mmm," She whispered in her sweet dreams.